

American Home Missionary Society.

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THE MOTIVE POWER IN
HOME MISSIONS.

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I. *What is the motive power in our Home Missionary Work?* We all believe it must be a real power. A tremendous weight is to be lifted. What power is adequate? Where does it reside?

Not, I reply, in amended organizations. All organization is but the tool of power. Not in the liberalism of emasculated doctrines. Negations are not a power. The world needs a power. Not in patriotism. Patriotism touches bottom in no man's soul, simply because country is after all not the highest end. To maintain our Protestant faith and our Western civilization, and so build up a great, healthy, homogeneous people delivered from the ulcerous sores of the oriental nations, is a great motive; but to the true child of God it is only a means to an end, after all. Neither does the power lie in denominational zeal. None of these can lift men's souls to the sustained, heroic, God-like service of Home Missions.

What then is the motive power? It must be the same as in God, for we are made in God's image. What was the power that moved God to his world-mission? It had two grand elements—*need* and *love*. The need, to God's mind, was not national but human: not better government and more bread, but redemption from the guilt and doom of sin. When Christ wept over men, it was not over their need of a homestead but of virtue. An atheist can mourn over our pains, but only God or the man of God laments over our guilt. It was the wrath to come that appalled Christ. To him, one lost soul was in itself a universe of woe. And here, even in our own land, there may be forty millions unsaved! So appalling is this need, as Christ viewed it, that some men "have rushed distracted from its contemplation to solace themselves with the forlorn hope that surely it is too dreadful to be true." Such is the need.

Our danger is, that in the working of our Christian missions, we shall crowd it into the background and put education, material development, or national stability as our goal, and so obscure the real reason for Christ's mission and ours.

The other element is *love*. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son." Were it not that these words have fallen so long on dead hearts they would startle the nations into wondering adoration, as they do the angels. God so

loved that he could not bear this dropping of souls into an eternity of doom; and he cannot bear it to-day. We talk about the great "emergency" in our mission work. It is because there is an emergency in the divine mind. God sees here to-day probably fifty-three millions of people, increasing at the rate of nearly seven hundred thousand a year by immigration alone, and only one in five a redeemed soul! It was out of this love that the gospel itself was born. It is this that determines and explains the very form and intensity of God's address to men. It was this that found expression in the out-gushing compassion of Jesus when he saw "the multitudes as sheep without a shepherd," and cried out with that deep cry which is still echoing down the ages, "the harvest truly is plenteous but the laborers are few." Now the fact with which the Home Missionary Society has to grapple, is not primarily that so many diverse nationalities are coming in upon us as to wreck our government and our Anglo-Saxon civilization, but that these millions are perishing in their sins. The problem which our churches have on hand is this: *Given* millions of lost souls and a gospel adequate to save them; *required*—how to apply it. Nothing else but this saving of men from a lost eternity is a motive great enough to give our mission work the true evangelistic momentum. Mere humanitarianism droops and dies under the weight of either home or foreign missions. But this motive power

of which I speak, is the winged messenger of hope. Look at the sublime audacity of faith and hopefulness for man, exhibited by those who came with the story of Christ into that hell of rotting heathenism, the Roman Empire. The greatest men had become abject. Simonides and Seneca and Pliny had concluded that the "aim of philosophy" was to teach men to despise life. But Paul and the Christian fathers announced a gospel of hope. The empire felt it, like the first thrill of returning life to a putrefying corpse. The presentation of Home Missionary geography with its vast extent and its spiritual blight may move the mind for a time with a kind of moral intoxication, but our mission work never puts on its true grandeur till we thus trace its origin to the divine decree and connect its progress with the eternal years of God.

II. *What now is the hindrance in the way of an enlarged missionary work?*

I reply, not chiefly the lack of knowledge. We know more than we feel. Not the lack of material in the churches. Not the lack of money. Not the defective policy of the American Home Missionary Society. That Society is one of the noblest and most richly blessed in the world. Its history is an inspiration. Its officers are hardly to be matched for wisdom, ability, and consecration. The real hindrance lies in the lack of whole-souled loyalty to Christ among his people. The

great motive which moved God to come into this world of sin and suffering has not taken hold of us. Christ's conception of the Christian life and mission has been but feebly grasped or not grasped at all.

III. *What then are the duties of the hour?*

(1) The first and most important of all is to turn and hold attention to this motive power— infinite *need* and *love*. Our missionary work must partake of the tremendous seriousness which lay upon the soul of Christ when he came to a doomed world to pull souls out of the fire. Gethsemane ! Calvary ! must be the watch-words of God's missionary hosts. Once here, and at the work, it was a small thing to Christ, who laughed or wept, or who drove the nails through his hands and feet. *They must be driven.*

(2) We must recognize and emphasize the element of time. God is the author of "emergencies." There are times when, historically viewed, God seems *not to be in a hurry*. His infinite benevolence is always guided by his eternal wisdom. His compassion never leads him to precipitate a movement till all the circumstances are ripe for the best possible result. The cries and tears and groans of his people in Egypt did not shorten the years of Moses' preparation for his mission by the space of one hour. Forty years at the court of Pharaoh must be followed by forty more at the "back side of the desert."

Then the people were led out. As a nation God has kept us at the "back side of the desert" for more than a hundred years, till at last all things are ready on a gigantic scale. God's emergency is here. *He is now in a hurry.* *New settlement, foreign settlement, unparalleled rapidity of settlement, godless settlement,*—these are facts unique in our land, which God is thrusting upon us now.

(3) We must recognize the moral elements of danger entering into the foundation of Western society. The antagonism of different nationalities, in their views of religious duty, is one. The millions are coming here, not for religion, but for liberty and bread, and they bring their moral standards with them. The threatened loss of the Christian Sabbath is another. The spirit of Sabbath desecration, supported by old world infidelity and new world lust for gain, is laying its foundations in all the boundless, plastic West. Then too, more appalling than any other one thing that opposes the Kingdom of Christ, is the omnipresence,—I might almost say the omnipotence—in this land, of the *Satanic confederacy* of the liquor traffic. It is the one foe that conspires openly against all religion and all law except the "law of sin and death." It furnishes us one fifth of our National revenue, and so puts its yoke on the nation's neck. And this gigantic defiance, this Satanic confederacy against God and virtue, before which political parties crouch

and quail and bend the knee, has its home and foreign missions too. It is the first on every home missionary field, and is laying its foundations for future empire as well as we.

What now is God's message to the churches? Is it not this : that they are failing to grasp *his* thought and to appreciate *his* emergency? We are gaining ground; we are waking up; but we are not waking up fast enough to keep pace with this mighty movement of God's providence. We are like Rip Van Winkle, waking up after mighty changes and trying to meet the demands of to-day with the supplies of twenty years ago. The kingdom of God has but one *great* hindrance in this land. It is not Mormonism, or Romanism, or Infidelity—it is selfishness in the church of Christ. Christ has not really got the men, and so cannot get the money. When he gets the men, he will have the money.

What is God's message to the ministry? This: We, who preach Christ, standing as we do before this problem of the world's conversion, must take a new position. We must define conversion and church membership *anew* in the light, not of the past, but of the present. We must make, in our life and our preaching to the church, the parting with earthly goods for the love of Christ, more and more the test of religion. If we do our duty in these marvelous days and adjust ourselves to a great future, we must preach more and more the principles and grandeur of mission-

ary work. Oh, the mighty need of large, unselfish Christian sympathies ; of conquering faith ; of deep, burning convictions like those of Jesus ; of outflaming zeal and enthusiasm for missions in *all the pulpits of this land !*